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harrying the Spanish Empire's financial bases in the New World, worrying its military bases in the Old, and taking a hand in repelling the unlucky Armada. It is also an unusual account of his accomplishments as a navigator. Drake's circumnavigation of the globe, with all its implications for English understanding and aspiration in the Pacific, receives less attention than this upstart seaman's skillful operations in the shifting channels of the circumscribed worlds of court politics and speculative finance. This special emphasis provides some novel insights into the business of war during the reign of Elizabeth.

Francis Drake molded and served what might be termed the Elizabethan military-mercantile complex. The royal treasury could not bear the full cost of mounting expeditions against the enemies of the crown; the system of royal alliances often could not afford the acknowledgement of those enemies as such. So Drake's campaigns, like those of many of his contemporaries, were mounted as joint-stock ventures. The crown contributed some capital, while city merchants and private maritime interests made up the balance. All the investors, including the queen and her counselors, expected handsome dividends from the prizes seized in these nominally private exercises in undeclared war. With Drake in charge, they were not generally disappointed.

War and its preliminaries are the natural focus of this narrative. The nonbelligerent activities to which Francis Drake turned his political and entrepreneurial abilities—his long and effective service in the House of Commons, or his peacetime husbandry of a growing fortune—are left obscure. Altogether, Thomson's Drake is a partial figure. His puritan zealotry, his capacity for stern authoritarianism, his tastes for luxury and display and his passionate desire for conventional respectability are illumined through contemporary anecdotes, drawn from Spanish as well as English sources. But other aspects of his complex personality—including his family life and intimate associations—remain, perhaps inevitably, in shadow.

Unable to gain a clear sighting, Drake's latest biographer has measured his man by triangulation. Incomplete as the resulting portrait may be, it is the product of scrupulous biographical technique, as free from unfounded speculation as it is rich in vigor and detail.

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A Meditation About Flight

"STRANGER TO THE GROUND," by Richard Bach (Harper & Row, 178 pp., $5.95).

Reviewed by Ken Spencer

You take a little ribbing when you are an "airplane cuckoo" or a "flying nut," but there are pleasures that compensate. One of the pleasures is Richard Bach. Those of us who fly small planes and read magazines related to our hobby knew about Bach 10 years before the rest of the world discovered his "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" and started buying it by the carload.

There are few writers in aviation today who write about the subtle union of the man, the machine and the air with any feeling. Bach does, and he is one of the best. "Stranger to the Ground" is being republished in the wake of the million-dollar sale of "Jonathan Livingston" to a paperback publisher. "Stranger" was the first of his three books. Originally published in 1963, it is an outgrowth of his experience as an Air Force pilot when his Air National Guard squadron was called to active duty in Europe at the beginning of the '60s.

It is the story of a solo flight at night in a jet fighter. But it is more than the record of an hour and 45 minutes in the air. It is a meditation composed of memories of earlier flights, thoughts of the pilot in relation to his machine, and an expression of the longing of man's spirit for adventure and for life. Bach manages to say what every pilot feels about his private world aloft and about the bonds that link him to his predecessors in the air.

"The only distance that lies between me and a yellow-nosed ME-109," Bach muses in remembrance of the flyers of World War II, "is a little bend in the river called time. The wash of the waves on the sands of Calais. The bush of wind across checkerboard Europe. The spinning of one hour hand. Same air, same sea, same hour hand, same river of time. But the Messerschmitts are gone. And the magnificent Spitfires. Could my airplane tonight carry me not along the river, but across the bend of it, the world would look exactly as it looks tonight."

The beauty of Bach's work lies in his gift for letting you know how flight *feels*. To read him is to experience the thunder and whine of the turbine, the keenness of the air at 35,000 feet, the blackness of the night and the terror that inhabits the inside of a raging thunderstorm. "Stranger to the Ground" may not have the demonstrated appeal of "Jonathan Livingston," but it has many of the same qualities. It is for hopeless romantics, philosophers and anybody who longs for the feel of flight.

Ken Spencer is a Newsday photographer and flying nut.

Report From the Countercultures

"GULCHER: POST-ROCK CULTURAL PLURALISM IN AMERICA (1639-1980)," by R. Meltzer (Straight Arrow Books, 160 pp., $3.00).

"SMOKESTACK EL ROPO'S BEDSIDE READER" (Straight Arrow Books, 120 pp., $3.50).

"THE FIRESIGN THEATRE'S BIG BOOK OF PLAYS" (Straight Arrow Books, 144 pp., $4.00).

"YEAR ONE CATALOG: A SPIRITUAL DIRECTORY FOR THE NEW AGE," edited by Ira Friedlander (Harper & Row, 152 pp., $1.95).

Reviewed by Lewis Grossberger

Well, here are these four, or maybe it's five, books they sent me all in one package, a paperbackage, and I'm more or less reading them, not straight through really, but just sort of dipping in here or there. They are not books where you open up and roll your eyeballs straight down the line and three days later you snap shut and say, "Well, that was an interesting book; I'd like to see a movie of that one."

No, I'm just skimming around in the nonlinear mode, you know, so let's start with R. Meltzer because you have to start somewhere and it's impossible to discuss four books simultaneously, although the Firesign Theatre could probably pull it off. Or was it five? I don't know.

Meltzer, Multzer, Muleher, Culture, Culcher, Gulcher. That about sums it up. I knew a girl named Terry Meltzer in high school; I wonder where she is today. She was the only Meltzer I've ever met, but she wasn't as funny as R.

Meltzer (R., not Terry) has this style where he grabs a subject, shakes it around, turns it upside down, then inside out and pounds it against a wall, watching pieces fly off every which way, while snickering insanely. I can hear him. He's out there somewhere thinking about things we need thought about—like bottle caps, venereal disease, bubble gum cards, wrestling, cigaret pack design, the correct pronunciation of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., TV, clothing and music.

He asks: "Like who wants the size and shape of a dollar bill to determine the size and shape of the thing they're gonna keep their prized photos of the family in?" A pertinent question and one that may well determine.

Meltzer, however, fails to come to grips with the key question of why the U.S. was so completely unprepared at Pearl Harbor. Apologists may be counted on to note that the book does not purport to be a work of history, but it seems obvious that such a reply is so facile and irrelevant as to be invalid on its face.

"Pithy insights, outrageous conclusions and filthy language characterize his shattering new book." That's what it said in the publicity release and I thought I'd pass it along. If press releases were reviewed instead of books, Straight Arrow Books would win raves, or even kudos, if there are any left.

And speaking of filthy language, people often ask me what or wh.. the Firesign Theatre is whenever I mention it or them during discussions of international finance, extrasensory perception, venereal disease or why the U.S. was unprepared at Pearl. Here are some replies I have formulated over the years:

1. A new kind of religious cult. 2. An electrochemical mutation. 3. The Marx Brothers on LSD. 4. The only radio program you have to play on a turntable. 5. Travelers from Inner Space.

Looking back at the last paragraph, I see now that none of these descriptions even comes close. Would you please disregard the last paragraph? Go back and read about R. Meltzer while I try this again. Listen, we can't all be Edmund Wilson.

Okay, I'm ready.

It can be safely said, however, that of all the contemporary four-man working units extant, none has gone so far as the Firesign Theatre in excavating the history of the future. Indeed, Firesign not only has identified the five lifestyles of future man (the Berserkers, the Zips, the Boogies, the Beaners and the Bozos); it also is the only organization of any kind to have produced a book titled "The Firesign Theatre's Big Book of Plays."

Here at last is a book that all of us can tapdance to. Young and old, clone and android alike, each of us has wondered at some point in our anxiety-filled lives just what the hell it all means. It is this profound question that the Firesign Theatre so dutifully ignores.

Yet the unsettling if essentially meaningless truth remains that reading the Firesign is akin to watching the radio. Like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on white, Firesign does not take easily to the bookshelf. Still, true Signophiles (and there may be well over six) will welcome this opportunity to distinguish Philip Proctor from Phil Austin.

One would be justified in asking, of course, just what any of this has to do with "Smokestack El Ropo's Bedside Reader." And since one has introduced the matter, I should like to lay to rest for one's and for all, the base and baseless rumor that Smokestack El Ropo is really the pseudonym of William F. Buckley Jr. This is intolerable nonsense and should not be believed for a second.

On the other hand, a merely cursory examination of the aforementioned volume will reveal it to be a compendium of fables, lore and hot dope tales from the country's only rolling newspaper. In it, we learn the location of the nation's only legal marijuana plantation and why Nikita Khrushchev was always smiling, as well as how to play the 12-button telephone. But not a word about Pearl Harbor.

For those who are curious about such heady matters, as well as for those who are out of rolling papers, "Bedside Reader" is an acceptable compromise with reality. Still, there are others and they cannot be forgotten.

Nor can we forget "Year One Catalog," a kind of Yellow Pages of swamidom. Turning reverently to the Mystical East and remembering to keep our palms together at all times, we discover:

"Arunachala Ashrama is dedicated to the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, the Great Sage of modern India, who taught the path of Self-Knowledge. His central teaching is: WHO AM I?"

I know there was another book here somewhere, but I guess I've lost it. I think it had something to do with Pearl Harbor.

Lewis Grossberger is a Bozo with Zip tendencies.

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